



Vol. 41. No 3

# The Maryland Yellowthroat

August 2021



Photo by Bruce Beehler

With the pandemic subsiding, at least for the moment, MOS members have been emerging from their shelters and heading afield, notably Bruce Beehler who took this beautiful photo of a Hudsonian Godwit in Alaska. See where else we have been going in Chapter Chatter

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## **The Maryland Yellowthroat**

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### **Editor's Note**

For much of the past year, COVID kept most of us, even the world travelers, rooted on home turf. So, my wife, Margaret, and I decided this would be an opportune time to try out local trails and natural areas beyond our usual well-trodden haunts. And it was thus that we discovered the MOS sanctuaries, wondering why they hadn't been on our radar before. On a pleasant weekend this past May, then, we found ourselves exploring the Carey Run and Chandler and Eleanor Robbins Sanctuaries in Garrett County. We enjoyed close encounters with such birds as Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Scarlet Tanagers, and a host of warblers, but what we especially appreciated was the peace that came with having miles of trails through forest and field all to ourselves.

If, like us, you haven't roamed the MOS sanctuaries much, then a new series of articles that we are inaugurating this issue may be of interest. Marcia Watson, who in addition to everything else that she does and has done for the MOS, is a passionate sanctuary champion and has kindly agreed to present sanctuary profiles in this and subsequent issues. Her first entry, beginning on page 8, is the Pelot Sanctuary in Caroline County. With this article, and the ones that follow, we hope you might be inspired to discover MOS sanctuaries new to you that enhance your enjoyment of our state's natural heritage, as well as your appreciation of MOS's work in helping preserve it..

In the May issue of the Yellowthroat, we mentioned that we wanted to reach out to encourage scientists and natural resource managers working with our state birds and natural areas to share their insights and discoveries. So, we are very happy to include in this issue Dr. Dan Small's account of his Natural Lands Project, which works with landowners in creating and managing grassland habitats in the state. Together with Bob Long's wonderful article describing his work with Bobwhite in the May issue, they give us an uplifting view of the creative efforts being made to develop and protect a fascinating, yet threatened, Maryland habitat. Likewise, we are grateful for Adam Child's account of the natural areas beyond the beach at Sandy Point State Park and some of the efforts being made to manage them, notably in the Corcoran Woods Environmental Area.

Many, if not most of us, use eBird regularly to report and learn of current bird sightings of interest. Unbeknownst to many, if not most of us, a small group of dedicated individuals spends a great deal of time and effort ensuring all those reports are fit for public consumption. So, we are delighted that one of those stalwarts, Tyler Bell, is giving us a peek behind the curtain to see what he and his colleagues go through to get those eBird reports out to us on a daily basis. Meanwhile, on other fronts, we get updates on youth activities from George Radcliffe and Bald Eagle nesting success from Chris Eberly of the MCBP. And, speaking of updates, Jean Wheeler once again fills us in on, well, us, and it turns out that we have been up to a lot, pandemic or not. No surprise there.

Finally, Howard County Bird Club member and author Julie Dunlap gives us a review of an intriguing new book. Chris Stirrat alerts us to the upcoming Maryland Fall Bird Count. And Melissa Boyle-Acuti, Chief of Interpretation for the Maryland Park Service, introduces us to the Maryland Park Service's "Create Your Own State Park" program. Just the thing for our home turfs, whether we are grounded or not.

### **Erratum**

On page 22-23 of the May issue Chapter Chatter, the individuals in Austin, Texas, who inspired the Anne Arundel Bird Club and the Friends of Kinder Farm Park to install a Chimney Swift tower were misidentified. They are Paul and Georgina Kyle (not Lyle).



## President's Corner

By the time that you receive this issue of the Yellowthroat, fall migration will have started. Where has the summer gone? And can it take the heat and humidity with it as it goes? Please?

For the past several months, there have been reports of diseased and dying songbirds, not only in our state, but in at least 11 other states and DC. The species involved were initially reported to be blue jays, robins, grackles, and starlings, but cases have also emerged in Carolina wrens, catbirds, house finches, sparrows, and other birds. The U.S. Geological Survey has been working with state wildlife agencies in the affected states to determine the cause of the illness and death, but no determinative cause has been found. The usual suspects – salmonella, chlamydia, and viruses such as avian influenza, West Nile, and herpes – have been ruled out through testing. It is not known whether this is a transmissible disease, or something caused by environmental pathogens. One possible connection, the emergence of the 17-year cicada, has become less and less likely, as the geographic range of the epidemic is larger than the range of the Brood X cicadas, and the deaths are continuing (though becoming less common) while the cicadas have disappeared. A worrisome indication that the cause might be a transmissible disease were the six hawks recently brought into City Wildlife, the DC's only wildlife rehab center, with similar symptoms. Could the hawks have eaten infected birds and gotten sick?

In light of the uncertainty, wildlife agencies in the 12 states have suggested that people stop feeding birds until more is known. At bird feeders, birds crowd together, touching common surfaces and providing paths for transmission. In an outbreak such as this, our normal practice of regular cleaning of the feeders and bird baths is not enough. Just as we practiced social distancing during COVID, we should allow the birds to practice social distancing. Fortunately, at this time of year, the birds are not reliant on our feeders for food; there is an abundance available. Indeed, the only purpose for having feeders up is for our own entertainment. I've stopped filling my own feeders because the importance of stopping the potential transmission of a disease far outweighs the entertainment I get from watching the birds at the feeder.

The annual MOS Convention was virtual this year, a first, and we hope, a last. From a technical point of view, the convention was largely a success, with no major technical glitches, although those who attended the convention had to learn how to navigate through yet another new website. What was missing from the virtual convention, though,

was the joy of reconnecting with birding friends from across the state, the comradery of going on a field trip together, and the chance to visit a new corner of Maryland. Next year, we hope to be able to hold an actual in-person convention in Cumberland, May 20-22. Although personal connection between MOS members was not possible in this convention, there were several innovations that proved to be quite successful. For one, the seminars were pre-recorded, allowing the attendees to watch the presentations at their leisure, and giving the viewers the chance to pause the video to look closely at a graph. Similarly, the posters in the poster session were available for viewing prior to the session (and some were accompanied by a video presentation). Finally, the keynote speeches were recorded, and all of these videos are now available for viewing. To see these videos, go to [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and search for "Maryland Ornithological Society". You should see the MOS logo, and if you click on the logo, the available videos are listed. They can also be found on the MOS convention site, [MOSConvention.org](https://mosconvention.org) (click on the titles in the agenda). And next year, we expect to make it possible to watch the keynote speeches even for those who are unable to attend the convention in person.

The experience of putting on a virtual convention, and creating a YouTube channel for MOS, has once again underlined the need for MOS to organize its digital presence in the on-line world in a manner that is reliable, easy to manage, and safe from disruption. Currently, MOS is too reliant on the digital capabilities of a few volunteers, and there is usually no backup for these volunteers. One of the difficulties is that we use many different on-line services – MailChimp, Google Workspace, Word Press, and Lucid, not to mention the social media sites Facebook and YouTube (and I'm probably forgetting a few) – and there is little to no commonality to be found among these applications. But as the on-line world becomes more and more prevalent in our lives, MOS needs to ensure that it has the capability of keeping up in that world. The hodge-podge approach that we have used so far isn't going to work much longer.

In addition to seeking a new way forward to manage our on-line presence, we need to think about how to grow our organization in other ways, and not just in terms of getting new members. Almost all of the programs that MOS now supports were started in the 20th century (that was last millennium!), and some of these programs are no longer active. Are there new programs that we should be starting, that are more relevant to the 21st century? Currently, MOS does little in the way of supporting direct conservation beyond its current (and quite important) campaign of advocating for the birds in the state legislature, Congress,

and federal agencies. Should we undertake a program of Conservation Grants, much like our current program of research grants, with the intent of supporting projects that actively help conserve our bird populations? Should we look to expand our sanctuary properties, and work towards a network of connected conserved properties that serve wildlife best? Are there directions other than conservation that we should be moving in?

These questions, and many more, need to be answered by you, the members of MOS. We will be sending out a survey later this fall to a random subset of MOS members, asking for your opinions about what you think MOS should be doing for you and for the birds that you love to watch. If you are asked to participate, please take the time to fill out the survey. The opinions that you provide will help MOS navigate forward into the 21st century.

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President, MOS

## YMOS Big Day – May 8, 2021

By George Radcliffe

Nine youth teams, made up of 46 individuals, and ten family teams participated in the YMOS Big Day this year. Although students from England and 7 states participated, 247 species were found in the MD/DE/VA area, and an Anhinga, Evening Grosbeak, and Rough-legged Hawk were highlights. Family teams birded together, but most of the youth teams birded separately, combining species found for a total team score. Our youngest team, the Calico Catbirds, found 68 species, and the MoCo Teals on Wheels (the Tea family) was our top family team with 137 species. In addition, one of the YMOS teams also participated in the World Series of Birding, once again held virtually due to COVID. Each team had a captain, scouted the area each was going to bird on the Big Day, and coordinated so that they would cover all potential habitats. Excerpts from several of the summaries follow:

**Desert Chucklers – 110 species** – Joseph, Samantha, Shawn, Georgia, Tyme, Eitan, Lance, Brian, Nara (captain)

We went out early in the morning and found our first bird on top of a barn. It was a Meadowlark singing his heart out no matter how close we got. He was accompanied by a Red-eyed Vireo who kept droning on the entire time we were there. On the road, we encountered Wild Turkeys talking with Turkey Vultures in a cornfield. We were wondering what they were talking about. While at Gunpowder State Park, we heard a Yellow-billed Cuckoo

starting a knock-knock joke and a very sweet-sounding Baltimore Oriole. At our house, we saw 5 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks (3 male, 2 female) with a lonely female Purple Finch who was tagging along with the gang. They were there 5 days earlier, and stuck around until finally leaving on the Big Day, just for us to count them into our list.

**MD REKN Knots (Our World Series Team)** - Josie, David, Scott, Zach, Eaton, Jonathan (captain)

For this event we all decided it was best that we split up and each cover a different habitat to produce the best species total. Scott covered Dorchester, Somerset and Worcester counties, Jonathan did Queen Anne's, Josie birded the Montgomery area, David birded western MD, and Zach and Eaton covered the southern western shore. Most of us started at midnight, or just after, and we submitted our list to NJ Audubon around 10pm.

The weather was not ideal for migrants with NW winds over much of MD, but the winds were light enough on the western shore for a few birds to move. This was not the case for David who had to endure below freezing temps and snow for most of the early morning. It worked out well in the end with most of the migrant passerines being found by someone over the course of the day.

We all saw many unexpected and rare birds throughout the day including: Rough-legged Hawk, Evening Grosbeak, Sedge Wren, Black Tern, 3 Swan species, American Pipit, Horned Grebe, Anhinga, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck and Henslow's Sparrow. We also tallied 31 species of warblers. A few species that we missed were White-rumped Sandpiper, Winter Wren and Tennessee Warbler.

## eBird, A Peek Behind The Curtain

by Tyler Bell

Most birders nowadays use eBird. It has grown in popularity over the many years of its existence. Initially, it was to be solely an online sightings database but birders balked because there wasn't really anything in it for them other than the glory of submitting all of your sightings! The folks at Cornell realized this and changed the focus allowing users to display their county, state, country, etc. totals. Making it a numbers game was a game changer and it started growing by leaps and bounds.

If you have been a long-time user, you will remember that it used to be clunky. The product that you see now is a pretty well-oiled machine. Add to that the fact that there's a smart phone app, and the popularity just keeps expanding. I've been using eBird since before 2007 when the American Birding Association held its annual



## eBird, A Peek Behind The Curtain

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convention in Lafayette, LA. Brian Sullivan gave a talk about eBird and was looking for reviewers in several states. Maryland was one. And that's how I became a reviewer in MD!

Anyway, I get to see how it works as both a user and a reviewer. So, let's start with a simple view from the public side. Let's say that you're out in the field and find a large number of Snow Geese in Baltimore County. Let's say 25 flying north in a loose skein. Knowing that Snow Goose is uncommon on the western shore, you take some pix. When you enter your checklist, you get a pop up requiring more details. If you are using the app, you may not be able to get photos from your camera to your phone. Some people take a photo of the back of the camera with their phone and link it as a placeholder until they get home. If you get home and follow through, good for you. Either way, you documented it. This is considered getting flagged.

As a user, not a reviewer, at this point you're wondering why did that happen? What does it mean when my sighting is flagged? Filters. eBird is driven by a series of filters with threshold values for each species. When I started reviewing for Maryland and North Dakota, each state had only one single set of filters for the entire state. In North Dakota, that's not so problematic compared to Maryland. The Black-capped/Carolina Chickadee filters were a nightmare unto themselves. However, you need data to help sort out county level filters, and it took a few years to build that enough to make it work. Reviewers are constantly tweaking the filters as populations are changing. There's even a special date range to deal with the Great Backyard Bird Count!

Back to the Snow Geese. 25 birds tripped the filter threshold of 10 birds. Had there been a Ross's Goose in the flock, a single bird would have tripped the filter because it is set to zero all year. You're still confused about what all of this means. Below is a screen shot from the Baltimore County filter. This is only the top. It contains all of the regularly occurring species, subspecies, hybrids and slashes. There's even a Passerine sp. set at 1000.

Basically, there are two reasons why you get flagged: high count or rarity. As a user, what can you do to smooth the process? There are quite a few things. First, think about flagged species as a good thing, not a nuisance. Sure, that means you need to put some details in about your sighting but that means your sighting is significant! If it is simply because of a high count, reviewers really appreciate some

simple details like "Counted individually." or "Counted a group of 25 then applied that to the rest of the group." Just show the reviewers that you've taken a little effort to count accurately. Most of the time, a rounding error of 5-10% isn't going to adversely affect the data in the least.

The other reason you got flagged is because of rarity. If a species threshold is zero, particularly one that is zero all year long, details matter. Comments such as "Seen well.", "Looks just like page X in Field Guide Y.", "Group leader IDED it for me." or "I'm very familiar with this species from my time living out west." are not helpful. That means the time that you spent writing will now be multiplied several times because the reviewer that tackles your flagged submission has to contact you, then you have to write back to them. Despite having five active reviewers currently, the review queue rarely dips below 1000 submissions. Most of the active eBird users in Maryland understand much of this process in some innate way. Many are well versed enough in the status and distribution of birds throughout the state that they instantly know that something may require documentation and provide photos. How some users get the quality of photos that are submitted is astonishing to me, a sub-par photographer at best.

If you're not the best photographer, you probably have a miracle in your pocket - your smart phone. The images or video from most cell phones are good enough to obtain documentation quality images, or better. And, if the bird you are trying to document is singing, the microphones on cell phones are quite sensitive and it's easy to upload audio clips to checklists from your phone. Plus, you can use your phone to take photos through your spotting scope even if you don't have a dedicated phone/scope attachment.

Besides photos, video and audio, what are the reviewers looking for that will keep them from pestering you? Give us some idea of what you were looking at. Field marks, noted in the field, not afterward while browsing a guide, are best. They don't have to be perfect. Notes on how you separated your bird from other similar species really helps. Some phonetic description of what you heard, too. Let's say you saw an Olive-sided Flycatcher. It'll get flagged everywhere, anytime. Perhaps something like, "Big headed Contopus with dark vested appearance. Flew from top of dead snag. Occasionally calling "Quick! Three beers!" For a lot of not so rare birds, a few simple details are sufficient.

And, be aware that the reviewers work hand in hand with the MD/DC Bird Records Committee. For records committee reviewable species without slam dunk

## eBird, A Peek Behind The Curtain

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documentation, reviewers will not validate or invalidate your submission without a committee ruling. On the other hand, rare birds, defined as zero threshold value and RC reviewable, that are well documented are typically automatically validated as "Known to be at location". If you don't have adequate documentation of something like that, a simple note like, "Continuing" works.

Hopefully, this glimpse behind the curtain may help both you, as a user, and us, as reviewers in a mutually beneficial way!

### Maryland Fall Count 2021

In this time of Covid-19 the annual Fall Seasonal Bird Count sponsored by MOS will be held on the 3rd weekend of September in the Maryland-DC area. Individual coordinators will specify any special conditions that they feel necessary to ensure participant safety as hopefully the pandemic conditions continue to improve. The MOS Board has left the choice of whether the count will be on Saturday the 18th or Sunday the 19th to local chapters and coordinators. In areas without an identified coordinator, individual parties submit their results directly to the statewide coordinator for inclusion.

Anyone can participate, no matter your skill level. Every pair of eyes helps, and it can be a great learning experience and a lot of fun. The results of the count will appear in an article in the Spring 2022 issue of *Maryland Birdlife*.

The guidelines for this count are generally the same as those used for all seasonal counts. Local coordinators will assign volunteers to areas, honoring requests whenever possible. Party leaders are responsible for tracking party miles and times, names of participants, and documentation for unusual sightings. Individual coordinators may provide specific instructions on how they want to receive inputs. Options include emailing copies of eBird checklists, sending photos/scans of hard copies you created, or a copy of the simple Excel spreadsheet (available on MOS website). A new checklist compilation form (AOS Supplement Order 60) and a spreadsheet capable of being sorted in either AOS or eBird order is available on the MOS website at the following link:

**<https://mdbirds.org/go-birdwatching/count-birds/fall-count-fall-migration/>**

The list includes the species one could expect to find in Maryland during this season. Those species on the list requiring further written documentation are noted with asterisks, and all write-ins require full details.

The fall counts, dates, and compilers (that were confirmed by the calendar deadline) are listed in the MOS Yellowthroat calendar. **A list of the county coordinators can also be accessed on the MOS website listed above and in the on-line MOS calendar.** Anyone who has organized a count that is not included, or who is interested in volunteering as a coordinator for another county currently without a coordinator, is encouraged to contact the state coordinator.

**Deadline for submitting completed reports to your county/chapter coordinator is October 1, 2021. County compilers are asked to submit compilations to the state coordinator by October 15.**

If you don't have web access or you are interested in counting in a county without a coordinator, contact the state-wide Fall Count Coordinator directly. Individual parties or other groups (e.g. Hawk Watch sites) who count in areas without a coordinator, but have data for the count dates, are asked to submit their data along with details on what area was covered, participants, and coverage statistics directly to the state Fall Count Coordinator by October 15.

Join the fun and have a great day birding!

Chuck Stirrat,

MOS State-wide Fall Count Coordinator

13318 Hunt Ridge, Ellicott City, MD 21042-1155

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## MBCP Update – July 2021

### Bald Eagle nesting season and IBA surveys completed

Maryland Bald Eagle Nest Monitoring Program volunteers have completed monitoring for the 2020-2021 nesting season observations. This was our first full nesting season to use NestStory as our only data entry platform. We ended the season with 476 documented Bald Eagle nests. As you can see in the screenshot of the NestStory administrator's screen, NestStory provides us with an up-to-date picture of the status of all eagle nests. However, we have data for fewer than 100 of these nests, as you can also see in the screenshot.

Bald



Eagle nest monitors, please help us! Go to your NestStory account and enter your data for this nesting season. In addition to getting accurate data for Bald Eagle productivity and nest status, NestStory allow us to summarize the hours our volunteers have spent monitoring and entering data. This is important because we use these volunteer hours as match for our funding from MD DNR by way of the federal Pittman-Robertson Act. This funding requires a match from non-federal sources. Did you know that each volunteer hour is worth \$28.54? Thus, 1,000 volunteer hours during the eagle nesting season equates to \$28,540 in matching funds.

The Maryland Bird Conservation Partnership partners with Audubon Maryland-DC (now part of Audubon Mid-Atlantic) on monitoring at Maryland's Important Bird Areas (IBA). While we didn't have much time to prepare for field work due to easing of COVID restrictions, all IBAs that were monitored in 2019 were once again surveyed this year. Field work for 2020 did not take place due to COVID.

Thank you to all the volunteers who help with Bald Eagle and IBA monitoring! Your time is valuable, and the data you collect are invaluable!

- Chris Eberly, Executive Director, Maryland Bird Conservation Partnership



**Spotlight on:**  
**Pelot MOS Sanctuary**  
**Caroline County**

*Article and Photographs by Marcia Watson*

*Note: This article is the first in a series spotlighting the ten sanctuaries owned by the Maryland Ornithological Society. The MOS sanctuaries are spread across the state from Garrett County to Somerset County, but the majority are little-known and seldom visited. Yet all the sanctuaries have something to offer the birder, naturalist, or conservationist.*

**Size:** Approximately 60 acres.

**Habitats:** Upland and bottomland forest, vegetated wetland/forested swamp, freshwater stream.

**Hours:** Daylight hours year-round; no reservations needed.

**Cost:** Free. Donations to the MOS Sanctuary Fund are always appreciated; donate online at <https://mdbirds.org/conservation/refuges-sanctuaries/#toggle-id-4>.

**Tips:** There is no hunting allowed on the sanctuary but there may be hunting on adjoining private lands. Be aware of hunting seasons and plan your visit accordingly. | No restrooms.

**Wheelchair Access:** The Sanctuary trail is natural surface and not wheelchair accessible, but there is good birding from the paved road shoulder.

**Best Seasons:** Fall through early summer.

**Breeding Bird Atlas Block:** Denton NE

**Multimedia:** Take an armchair tour of Pelot through a short YouTube video filmed by former MOS Sanctuary Committee Chair Dominic Nucifora; go to at [https://youtu.be/\\_oa5YyyUcNs](https://youtu.be/_oa5YyyUcNs).

**For maps and more information:** Go to <https://birdersguidemddc.org/site/pelot-mos-sanctuary/>.

The **Myrtle Simons Pelot MOS Sanctuary** (Pelot Sanctuary for short) is located in Caroline County, between the towns of Greensboro and Goldsboro, and very near the Delaware State Line. The sanctuary protects the stream valley of Gravelly Branch, a tributary of the Choptank River, which lies just a half-mile to the west. The western boundary of the sanctuary runs along Drapers Mill Road, and there is convenient parking on the wide road shoulder at the bridge over Gravelly Branch.



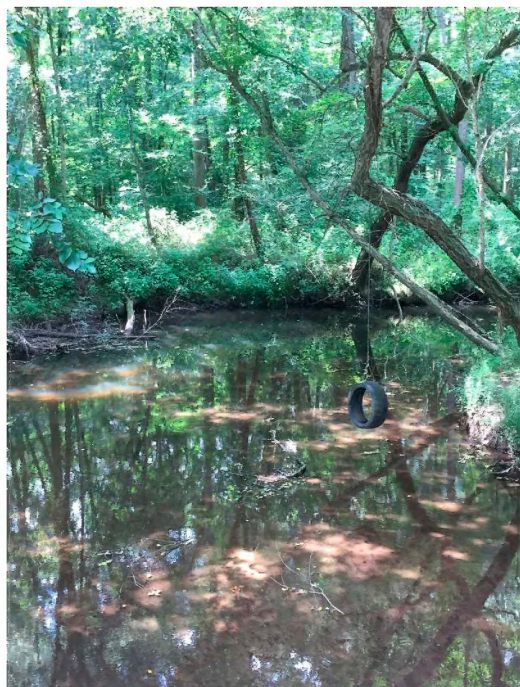


## Spotlight: Pelot MOS Sanctuary

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The sanctuary consists of approximately 60 acres of forested land, with Gravelly Branch running through its heart. At one time, the land was the site of a mill property, and the remains of a mill pond can still be seen as a slight depression in the landscape just south of the stream. The dam that formed the pond washed out in 1937, and the rich pond sediments now support a thriving wetland. This sanctuary is an oasis for native plants in the midst of a predominantly agricultural area. Besides birds, it also supports populations of amphibians, butterflies, dragonflies, and damselflies.

The sanctuary is named for Myrtle Simons Pelot, an active member of the Caroline County Bird Club. When Mrs. Pelot passed away at the age of 91 in 1971, she left her house in the town of Ridgely to the Caroline County chapter of MOS. As there were no restrictions on the gift, MOS and the Caroline County Bird Club decided to sell the house and use the proceeds to buy land suitable for a wildlife sanctuary. Since its purchase



in 1973, the Sanctuary has been cared for by members of the Caroline County Bird Club, which hosts an annual clean-up day, typically in the spring. For the schedule, see the chapter's website at <http://carolinebirdclubmos.blogspot.com>.

On the south side of Gravelly Branch, apart from the wetland at the mill pond site, the sanctuary is covered with an open deciduous forest that is more upland in nature and dominated by beech and oak with a few scattered conifers. Near the southwest corner of the sanctuary, a sign marks the entrance to a trail that heads east, roughly paralleling Gravelly Branch. (See trail map at <https://birdersguidemddc.org/site/pelot-mos-sanctuary/>). Along the trail, there are some low spots that remain wet much of the year, supporting populations of frogs and other amphibia. There is a small open area with a circle of white concrete benches approximately 200 yards in on the left side of the trail. This is an out-and-back trail: the trail peters out after about a half-mile, where you should turn around to return to Draper's Mill Road. Or feel free to bushwhack as far as you like to explore more of the sanctuary. The forest on the south side of Gravelly Branch is mostly

open and it is easy to walk through, even past the end of the trail.

The part of the sanctuary that lies north of Gravelly Branch used to have a foot-trail that ran along the boundary line, but this area is now quite grown over and it is difficult to find traces of the old trail. The north side of the sanctuary consists predominantly of floodplain deciduous forest with a rich understory of shrubs and groundcover.

### Why visit?

When searching for land for a sanctuary, the Caroline County Bird Club chose well. Pelot Sanctuary is strategically located in an area classified by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as a Targeted Ecological Area (TEA). TEAs are lands and watersheds identified by the DNR as the most ecologically valuable areas in the State; they are considered the "Best of the Best" and receive priority for conservation by the State. Specifically, Pelot Sanctuary is located in an area classified as Tier 1 – Critically Significant for Biodiversity Conservation, the highest classification under the Bionet Biological Diversity Conservation Network initiative. Read about Bionet at [https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Documents/BIONET\\_FactSheet.pdf](https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Documents/BIONET_FactSheet.pdf).



## Spotlight: Pelot MOS Sanctuary

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Pelot Sanctuary gets high marks from DNR for providing habitat connectivity; supporting rare species and wildlife habitat; supporting aquatic life; providing forest important for water quality protection; and for proximity to other protected lands, presenting conservation opportunities that contribute to landscape-scale protection, which is key for conserving healthy aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Because of its high conservation value, Pelot Sanctuary is appealing to native plant enthusiasts and to naturalists in general as well as to birders.

The eBird hotspot for Pelot MOS Sanctuary lists 89 species of birds as of this writing, but only 38 checklists have been submitted. With more visitation and submission of additional checklists, we can gain a more complete picture of the birds using the sanctuary, and we encourage you to visit and submit your checklist to eBird at

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1111044>.

If you are a county lister and need warblers for your Caroline County list, you might be particularly attracted by a good set of breeding warblers: Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Black-and-white Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Northern Parula, and Pine Warbler. Additional warblers can be found during migration, and Yellow-rumped Warblers overwinter.



Although Green Herons are not on the eBird list for the sanctuary, keep an eye open for them, because they were found as possible breeders in this atlas block during the Second Breeding Bird Atlas project. A possible wintering species is Rusty Blackbird: they are not on the sanctuary's list but have been found close by along the Choptank, so it's worth looking for them in the winter, as the sanctuary has the wet woods that they like.

### Directions:

From US Route 50, go east on MD Route 404 for approximately 7.0 miles, to the intersection with MD Route 480/Ridgely Road. Turn left to go northeast on Ridgely Road for 8.1 miles. When you reach the town of Greensboro, bear right onto Park Avenue for one block and then turn right to go east on MD Route 314/Whiteleysburg Road. In 0.6 miles, turn left to go north on Wothers Road, and in just 800 feet, turn right to continue north on Boyce Mill Road. In 0.7 miles, turn left to go north on Drapers Mill Road. In just under a mile, you'll reach the bridge over Gravelly Branch, with the sanctuary on your right (east side of the road). Park on the broad road shoulder near

the bridge and walk back south along the road to reach the sanctuary trailhead at the southwest corner of the sanctuary, opposite a cluster of mailboxes marking private lanes at #14088 – 14100. The trail and sanctuary sign is just south of a yellow "School Bus Stop Ahead" sign



# The Natural Lands Project: Connecting with Landowners on Maryland's Eastern Shore through an Iconic Gamebird

Article and Photographs by Dr. Dan Small

The Natural Lands Project (NLP) got its start in 2015, but the ground work for the project had been a long time in the making. Long-term efforts on the River and Field Campus (RAFC, formerly Chino Farms) creating and managing grassland and early successional habitat for Northern Bobwhite and other grassland dependent birds inspired our efforts to “get off the farm” and work with other landowners. Most Maryland birders and many locals on the Upper Shore know about the farm because it is one of the best examples of a property where wildlife, particularly those dependent on early successional habitat, can thrive alongside intense modern agriculture. There are a few other private properties and a couple of public land properties where there are small but healthy quail populations, but obviously this is not the case across most of the agricultural lands across the Shore. This is where NLP comes in.



Male Northern Bobwhite.

NLP is coordinated by staff at the Center for Environment & Society (CES), one of three signature centers at Washington College in Chestertown. You may be wondering why a center at a small liberal arts college is taking a leading role in the effort to restore quail populations on the Shore. The answer is three-fold, 1) CES bridges the gap between academia and community involvement, 2) providing real-world experiences for undergraduate students outside of the classroom, and 3) CES along with farm personnel have been managing habitat on RAFC for decades. The experience and resulting success of habitat work on RAFC combined with extensive community outreach provided the platform to hit the ground running, but first funding was needed to jump start the project. After all, no matter how interested farm owners are in helping declining quail populations, the financial side of things have to make sense.

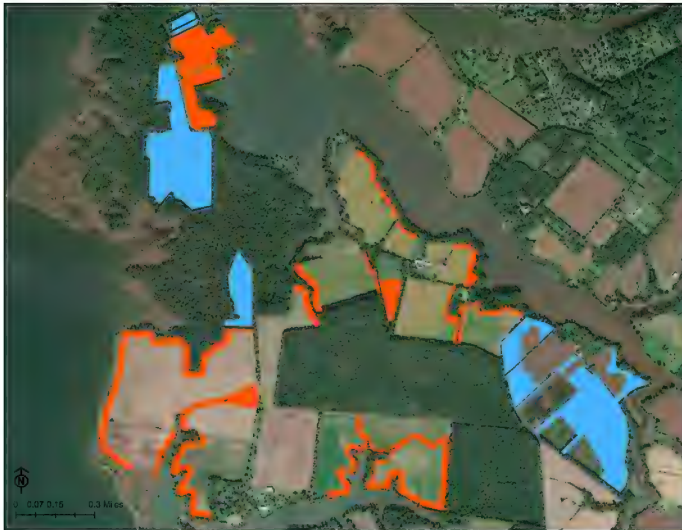
Initial funding to kickstart NLP was provided by MD DNR's Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund, or Trust Fund for short, which is funding dedicated to improving the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Luckily, here on the ag-dominated Shore the most cost-effective Best Management Practice (BMP) for reducing excess nutrients and sediment from entering local waterways are grass and wildflower buffers along farm field edges. While the granting agency is focused on improving water quality, we are focused on helping grassland dependent wildlife and that is what we talk about with landowners. But, it is not all wildlife that moves the needle with farm owners. The memories of “quail being everywhere” and “working the dogs during a fall morning from property to property” or “hearing the males whistling throughout the summer” are common themes throughout conversations with landowners who grew up on the Shore. This cultural connection now serves to motivate people to make a difference on their properties, but it is not necessarily to hunt birds again, it is just to see and hear birds again, something that most landowners may not have experienced in decades.

The reason for quail declines are numerous, but not overly complicated and Bob Long did a great job of introducing what needs to be done to reverse this long decline in the article “What Happened to the Quail??”, featured in Volume 4, Number 2 2021 edition of The Maryland Yellowthroat. Habitat is key and not just any habitat, it turns out quail are picky and efforts at RAFC provide an excellent model for what quail need to meet their seasonal needs. It comes down to native versus non-native grasses. Quail need clump-forming native warm season grasses interspersed with wildflowers for nesting and brood-rearing. Non-native pasture grasses form dense stands that lack the space for movement and limit plant diversity. The co-benefits are numerous when native grasses and wildflowers are planted for quail and include equal water quality improvement benefits, habitat for hundreds of beneficial insects and of course habitat for other grassland/early successional species most of which are also in decline. Hedgerows are a critical part of the mix as well. Creating a

## The Natural Lands Project

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balance of these habitats across a property, or ideally several closely connected properties (see map), by removing marginal cropland is the best possible way to help the remaining quail that are scattered around farms on the Shore.



*Map. Building habitat for Northern Bobwhite along the Chester River, west of Centreville. The close proximity of habitat projects to one another is highly beneficial to wildlife populations. Northern Bobwhite have been seen on two of these properties since NLP installed habitat two years ago. Orange indicates recent NLP meadows and buffers while blue polygons are existing early successional habitats.*

With the initial three years of funding from the Trust Fund NLP created 375 acres of diverse upland meadows and buffers in Kent and Queen Anne's Counties. The response from farm owners was enthusiastic to say the least, clearly there were people interested in making a difference but for

one reason or another had not made the move. It turns out that funding to cover project costs is not the only thing holding people back, they want help from people with experience and our success on RAFC provided the background for CES to do just that. Utilizing that momentum from the first grant, NLP has successfully received additional funding from the Trust Fund as well as the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation allowing us to expand our efforts across private properties on the middle and upper shore. To date, NLP has created 715 acres of buffers and meadow habitat across 38 private properties. It didn't take long for wildlife to find the habitat, migratory and dispersing grassland birds quickly found the installations and pollinators found wildflowers in July rather than corn or soybean fields. But the big question was whether quail, with their relatively short dispersal distances, would find the new habitat. The answer was yes! Quail have now been seen or heard on eight different properties and while these properties are a long way off from supporting a healthy population of birds, it certainly is a positive sign that there might be more birds on the landscape than we know. Creating and managing extensive breeding habitat on RAFC has demonstrated that quail can quickly populate an area, hopefully with all this new habitat across the landscape birds on these new project sites will do the same.



Purple Coneflower and Ox-eye Sunflower throughout a meadow planting at Sassafras Natural Resources Management Area in Kent County.

NLP has also been working on five public land properties in Kent, QA, and Caroline Counties adding an additional 360 acres of large meadows on both state and county lands. Conquest Preserve in QA County ([birdersguidemddc.org/site/conquest-preserve/](http://birdersguidemddc.org/site/conquest-preserve/)) and Sassafras NRMA in Kent County are two large project site examples where added habitat quickly made a difference. Last summer quail showed up at Sassafras for the first time in many years and the number of calling males have slowly been increasing at Conquest over the last couple of years since the habitat was planted. Hedgerows planted by restoration interns from the college complement the meadows and will help over-wintering survivorship once they mature. The great thing about the public land project sites is that both wildlife and public benefit.



## The Natural Lands Project

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While it is unrealistic to think that we will be able to get quail populations back to where they were in the 1960's, there is hope that converting marginal cropland into native early successional habitat will provide the opportunity for a healthy number of quail to thrive across areas of the Shore. Due to "clean" modern farming practices and increased development it is clear that quail need our help to maintain viable population levels and early success with NLP across project sites provides a good indication of what can happen when an effort is made to find the right balance between habitat and farming.

Dan Small is the Natural Lands Project Coordinator and can be reached at [dsmall2@washcoll.edu](mailto:dsmall2@washcoll.edu) if you are interested in learning more about quail, quail habitat or how to get involved in the project if you own farm land.



Male Dickcissel defending a territory on a three-year old project site in Kent County.



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail visiting New York Ironweed.

## A Trip to Sandy Point State Park

by

Adam Childs

On a warm summer evening traveling westbound on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, the sun shines a bright orange glow over Anne Arundel County. The sunlight passes through the last three Greenbury Point radio towers at the Naval Academy, illuminating the shipping tankers anchored in the middle of the bay. On the Annapolis side of the bridge lies a beautiful stretch of beach surrounded by densely-packed forest and thick wetlands: Sandy Point State Park. Built in 1952 on 786 acres of land, Sandy Point houses an array of treasures for any person who loves to be outdoors. Visitors can enjoy swimming and fishing along the shore with a gorgeous view of the bridge, while boaters have access to one of the largest public marinas in our local area. But the park has much more to offer other visitors than just waterside activities. With heavily wooded areas and ranked the #1 eBird hotspot in Maryland, there is so much more to Sandy Point than just lounging in the sand



Am I at the Beach?" is commonly asked by first-time visitors, and it's an honest question, because when entering the park it isn't obvious there is a beach. Guests are greeted by tall trees and bright green grass lining the road. Songbirds, deer and other local wildlife feed in the grass, while the roar of cicadas plays in the background. After passing the contact station, the first signs of water appear. The Chesapeake Bay Bridge comes into clear view as a number of Ospreys soar overhead, carrying fish caught from the Bay. Heading toward the beach, guests are introduced to open areas that allow for small groups to gather and much larger groups to have company events, parties, reunions and more. For those who like to walk instead of sit, there are two trails that can take visitors on a tour of the shorelines or back into the woods. These trails provide a quieter experience, with the sounds of wind and waves, as well as Ospreys, songbirds, frogs and other wildlife to accompany you. It also takes hikers away from the crowds at the beach and into a unique natural environment.



Ranger Jacob Hales holding a local Box Turtle in Corcoran Woods

Another beautiful area to visit is the Corcoran Woods Environmental Area, a densely-forested location used for in-season bow hunting as well as scientific study. Corcoran is one of the most fascinating areas in which to walk around and spend an afternoon. The area was named after Edward Corcoran, who originally owned a portion of the woodland. The Corcoran area was keenly studied by Colby Rucker, a local naturalist and writer from Anne Arundel County, who also developed the globally-used Rucker Index to rate forests based on average tree height. The most common tree found in this area is Tulip Poplar, which can stretch over 100 feet in the air with large trunks and deep root systems. Other common trees include the American Holly and Sweetgum, as well as a number of Spicebushes. Walking along the trail, the forest floor is elegantly covered by blankets of wood ferns, while hidden birds sing in the trees, and even the occasional box turtle says hello.

The Corcoran area has been mostly untouched for many years, which has allowed for wildlife and vegetation to flourish and thrive away from human activities. But this has also led to the rampant growth of invasive species of plants throughout the area that choke out the native species of the part. Honeysuckles, ivy, and other invasive plants can be seen very often, as well as invasive vines reminiscent of steel ropes wrapping around tree trunks. The park staff has been undergoing a multi-year effort to exterminate as many invasive plant species as



## A Trip to Sandy Point State Park

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possible, including the invasive trees and phragmites that linger around the park.

Cutting invasives and planting native vegetation in their place has been the primary strategy to combat this around the park, including Corcoran Woods. Reintroducing these native species is critically important for our park and local area, says veteran Park Ranger Manuel Toscana, who heads much of the effort. While not an easy task, it is a necessary one.

"Eliminating invasive plant species helps keeps a positive biodiversity of native species in our park", he says, emphasizing the importance of replacing these species with native ones such as Black Walnut and different varieties of oak. To go along with planting native species, the park also highlights the Leave No Trace Seven Principles, which seek to educate guests about the importance of cleaning up their trash, respecting wildlife and keeping the park in good, clean condition. These principles are key in making Sandy Point a desirable place for guests, as well as keeping the local environment in great condition, as beachgoers and visitors are sharing the park with an array of local wildlife.

To finish up our tour of Sandy Point, I want to visit my personal favorite part of the park: the birds. As a member of the Central Audubon Society, I have truly fallen in love with our local Maryland birds, and there may be no better place to see these birds than at Sandy Point. Upon entering the park, you truly get the feeling you are in a wild, open aviary. Young, non-mating Ospreys circle the skies battling each other for an unclaimed nest stand to enjoy a fresh fish. The large trees and open picnic area at the entrance house a number of bird species. Our traditional songbirds in the park include Blue Jays, Caroline Wrens, Northern Cardinals, American Goldfinches, American Robins, Eastern Bluebirds, along with other birds like Common Grackles, Northern Mockingbirds, Belted Kingfishers, Ospreys, Great Blue and Green Herons, various duck species, Canada Geese, Peregrine Falcons and many more. Sharing the park with these birds has led to some unforgettable sights and experiences. The Northern Mockingbirds in the park are extremely vocal as they mimic many sounds consecutively, even mimicking the cranks of boat trailers letting their boats down into the water. Above the boaters, a pair of Ospreys has made a home on top of a light post in the marina. A newborn chick has emerged from the nest, with Mom and Dad never too far away.

The Ospreys of the park often dive bomb the shorelines of the youth group areas, with an abundance of fish lurking near the rocks. They share this area with a pair of Trumpeter Swans, an extremely rare sight in Maryland but common for parkgoers. On the jetty, a rock wall used by fishermen, an occasional Great Egret sits amongst the lines of rods in the water. Instead of tossing in a line, the egret waits for an unfortunate fish to come near before being plucked from the water. The egret's cousin, the Great Blue Heron, is a more lonesome fellow and watches over the marina in the fallen trees for a fish to meet a similar fate. Not far away under the Bay Bridge, Peregrine Falcons

gather and perch together while occasionally passing through the park to feed. It is an incredible sight to see these falcons when they quickly travel through a wooded area. With their great vision they can soar over, under and around the maze of tree branches, flying through as if nothing is there.

Back in Corcoran Woods, the birds become less visible but much more vocal. The roaring of cicadas and the sticky humidity don't seem to bother the birds and wildlife. Northern Cardinals and Robins are heard singing, while in my own hikes I've spotted a few large Pileated Woodpeckers. Many more birds live and visit this park that I haven't named, but which are still an incredible sight. This year at Sandy Point the park introduced a bird themed Park Quest, where birdwatchers can explore and record the birds and wildlife they encounter on their visit. Here at the park, there is no shortage of local wildlife waiting for you



Osprey nest overlooking the marina

## A Trip to Sandy Point State Park

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Whether it's a scorching day in the summer or a brisk fall afternoon, Sandy Point has something for those who enjoy being outside. Beachgoers, boaters, hikers and birdwatchers will find a sanctuary in this park, with something new to see each time you visit. If you are ever able to make it out to Sandy Point State Park, as you enjoy the beach, wildlife and view of the Bay, remember that there is a plethora of employees and volunteers that work hard to keep the park clean and ensuring everyone has as great experience. If you enjoy being outdoors, Sandy Point State Park has something for you.

Source: the portion about the history of Corcoran Woods was sourced from this recent article below on Corcoran; the rest was from interviews with staff and my own trips to Corcoran.

Holland, Jeff. "Jeff Holland: A Walk in Corcoran Woods Is a Stroll among Giants." *Capitalgazette.com*, 27 Feb. 2021, [www.capitalgazette.com/lifestyles/ac-cn-column-jeff-holland-2021228-20210227-us623ohcevbant7j7nqvleene-story.html](http://www.capitalgazette.com/lifestyles/ac-cn-column-jeff-holland-2021228-20210227-us623ohcevbant7j7nqvleene-story.html).



Trumpeter Swan at Sandy Point, photo by Joe Hanfman



## "Create Your Own State Park" Returns for 2021 Season

*Participants Can Support Nature and Win Park Prizes*

By Melissa Boyle

Dear MOS Members- The Maryland Park Service is in its second year of the "Create Your Own State Park" Program, which challenges you to carve out a little space at your home for your own miniature state park! This program was inspired by Dr. Doug Tallamy and took root last year during the COVID-19 pandemic, when most people were spending a lot more time at home. Many of you already probably know all about the many joys of nature, but being able to enjoy them from home may be a slight change for some. You don't always have to drive many miles to State Parks to experience them. One specific area that the Create Your Own State Park program focuses on is birds; whether that is having a feeder, bird bath, nest box or starting your life list, there are many ways to participate! Even if you have a small yard, or even no yard, you can hang a hummingbird feeder from your deck or balcony this time of the year. This program is a great intergenerational activity for families- many entries from the 2020 program included grandparents and grandchildren working together to create their very own State Park! The activities are also cross-curricular and incorporate science, technology, engineering, art, mathematics (STEAM) as well as good old fashioned outdoor play. New for 2021- we are adding a "Dark Skies" activity.

For more information, please see the official program announcement below. We encourage you to learn more about the program and also to participate in the "Create Your Own State Park" Program!

The [Maryland Park Service](#) is challenging Marylanders everywhere to join a new tradition — [Create Your Own State Park](#) at home! Begun during the pandemic in 2020, this innovative series of activities — with prizes available for participants — teaches Marylanders how to provide their own place to enjoy the outdoors and learn about nature, create wildlife habitat, attract more birds and butterflies, and have plenty of fun.

The Create Your Own State Park Challenge encourages people to enjoy their own outdoor spaces and to plant native trees and plants, just as the Maryland Park Service conserves and protects nature. After completing 10 or more activities and providing photo documentation, participants will be entered into the Create Your Own State Park prize drawing. Participants are encouraged to make a park entrance sign, draw a park map, plant a tree or native wildflower garden, or create a camping or picnic area or trails right in their own backyard.



*Photo by Maryland Department of Natural Resources*

The program, designed for all ages, drew great enthusiasm with people eager to participate and learn more about how to make their home more park-like and participate in this program. New activities are being added for the 2021 season.

"Maryland State Parks offer outdoor recreation experiences in Maryland's most scenic and important natural places," Maryland Park Service Superintendent Nita Settina said. "But nature isn't only found in parks, it's all around us. By participating in the Create Your Own State Park challenge, you can support wildlife and enjoy the awe and wonder of nature at home, every day."

Those who accept the challenge will receive a free day pass to access any State Park along with a certificate of completion and a packet of native plant seeds to use in your new home park. All valid entries will also be entered in a drawing to win a variety of prizes, ranging from complimentary passes for camping, cabin stays, and a Maryland Park Service Annual Park and Trail Passport.

"Create Your Own State Park" challenge entries are due by November 30, 2021.

## Book Review by Julie Dunlap

[juliejedunlap@earthlink.net](mailto:juliejedunlap@earthlink.net)

### Ornithery: For Your Mind, Body, and Soul

Holly Merker, Richard Crossley, and Holly Crossley

Crossley Books 212 pages, 978-0-578-82793-3

From the outset of the pandemic, people turned to birds for distraction, escape, solace, and hope. Some who rarely noticed birds before lockdown eagerly stocked up on bird seed, downloaded eBird, and vied for scarce spots on socially distanced walks for beginners. Experienced birders built skills in the field and on Zoom, participated in community science projects, planted wildlife gardens, and donated extra to fundraisers aimed at conserving the birds they love. As Covid-19 restrictions ease, bird advocates wonder if these welcome trends will continue, or fade faster than last year's collective obsession with *Tiger King*.

Holly Merker, an environmental educator and professional birding instructor, is determined that these quarantine-sparked enthusiasms grow and endure. A cancer survivor, Merker credits birdwatching with renewing her strength and spirit through a grueling course of chemotherapy. "During tough times in life," she insists, "we all need to find what fills us up and helps us recharge."

Determination to share the healing power of birds when needed most led Merker to team up with international birder and photographer Richard Crossley in early 2020 to create the popular Facebook group, Ornithery. Their ideas, insights, and dedication are now available between covers, too, in the new book (also co-authored by Sophie Crossley), *Ornithery: For Your Mind, Body, and Soul*. Nature's therapeutic value has long been recognized in both Eastern and Western traditions, with research in recent decades confirming that time outdoors can reduce blood pressure, elevate mood, and stimulate social relationships. This innovative volume leaves reporting evidence of salutary effects to other works, and instead offers practical exercises and spiritual guidance useful to anyone open to their thought-provoking methods. Those who read it with a pen in hand will make unexpected discoveries about self as well as birds.

Readers familiar with Crossley ID Guides will be delighted to find similarly stunning photographs in *Ornithery*. Many of the new work's 58 explorations—activity-focused

reflections and step-by-step observational challenges—are illustrated with composite images of birds at varying distances, with diverse plumages and behaviors, in the context of habitat. The busy compositions, through repeated examination, serve to retrain users' eyes to refocus from field marks to more significant identity clues: size, shape, structure, habitat, and behavior. A consummate observer, Crossley designed these plates so others can also learn to see what's important in the field, to take the time needed to study, rather than simply to identify, a bird. "You see," says Crossley, "it's all about the question, not the answer—it's that journey of discovery that is the fun."

Sophie Crossley contributes her own expertise, a meditative approach to the outdoors developed through the practice of freediving. Throughout *Ornithery*, specific activities, such as listening exercises to notice song variations or walks in search of behavior adaptations, are interspersed with meditations aimed at developing an inner stillness that fosters deeper connection. By cultivating awareness, for example, of how birds move in forests, fields, or waters, Sophie Crossley explains, we become mindful of their place in the environment and "can expand awareness of ourselves to the world around us."

The author trio takes turns as guides in the book's journaling section, each sharing brief personal reflections to stimulate readers' introspections. Most are upbeat: an anecdote about drawing birds closer in the garden, or a childhood memory of wonder at a bird's eggs. Anyone seeking an intimate exploration of mental health challenges should seek out Joe Harkness' often-wrenching memoir, *Bird Therapy*, about overcoming depression and anxiety through regular bird walks. "A stressful workload, a digital fatigue, constant demands for our attention" are among the quotidian reasons listed for seeking ornithery. The book's gentle, often-casual tone will feel welcoming to newcomers struggling to develop confidence with their first binoculars, and to ranked experts eager for a bird-y reprieve from competitive listing.

*Ornithery's* authors are like the best birding guides, leading us to places we didn't know we should be exploring. And like the best, most mindful, teachers, Merker, Crossley, and Crossley share their knowledge and joy, then create a quiet space for their lucky students to develop our own.





## ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY

OHIO 2021

In mid-May, *Kim & Gene Hudyma & Bobbi Reichwein* of Anne Arundel Bird Club and *Jean*

*Wheeler* of Harford County Bird Club traveled to Ohio for Spring warbler migration. We met up with Kathy Neugebauer, a former Montgomery County member and now living in Medina, Ohio. We obviously didn't go last year so we were especially eager to see migrants, and we weren't disappointed. This year, we stayed in Medina, near Akron, mainly because Magee Marsh's boardwalk was open by reservation only. We were not lacking in parks & other natural areas to visit because the Cleveland Metroparks System has 23,000+ acres to explore, many of which are in the city of Cleveland and its suburbs, both along the shore of Lake Erie and also along the rivers and creeks that flow through the region. We also explored Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

Kathy introduced us to some new areas including Firestone Park in Akron, Station Road, Wetmore Trail and Beaver Marsh in Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Wendy Park and Erie St. Cemetery in downtown Cleveland and The River Styx Park in Medina. We could not ignore the Magee area, visiting Ottawa NWR, Howard Marsh and of course Magee Marsh Wildlife Area. A new trail has been opened this year at Magee Marsh called Goosehaven Trail, and it's located outside of the boardwalk area connecting to a trail going to Ottawa NWR on the east side of the marsh and to the Estuary Trail on the west side of the marsh. We traveled to Magee one additional day, and, fortunately for us, we were able to bird the boardwalk.

The numerous parks we visited provided a variety of habitats during our 4 1/2 days of birding, and we saw approximately 100 species, 22 of which were warblers. Highlights include Trumpeter Swan (reintroduced in Ohio), Sandhill Crane, Blue-winged, Cerulean, Magnolia, Blackburnian, Black-throated Blue and Black-throated Green Warblers. Most of the species were expected; however, we were fortunate to see three Black-necked Stilts at Howard Marsh and an Eastern Whippoorwill at Erie St. Cemetery, both of which are categorized as rare to uncommon in the area, which may not occur annually, and which were therefore highlights. In addition to birds of the upper canopy and meadow, we enjoyed watching a

Common Loon navigating the pond at River Styx Park. Although easily found in Ohio, we all felt that the loon was somewhat late in its migration.

Besides centering our trips in the Medina area, we also decided to enjoy picnic lunches at many of the areas listed above, saving us valuable birding time. It was also delightful to be outdoors, unmasked, and enjoying what we all agreed was the best weather we've experienced on this annual trip.

We spotted many species of birds, as was our goal, but some of the best birds seen were right at Kathy's bird feeders. Baltimore and Orchard Orioles at the grape jelly, and Red-headed Woodpeckers at the suet feeders delighted us regularly.

Although we were disappointed not to bird at Magee Marsh everyday, the areas that Kathy scouted were filled with both migrating and local birds, and we enjoyed excellent birding in Ohio.

*Bobbi Reichwein*



Photo by Bobbi Reichwein

## CAROLINE COUNTY BIRD CLUB

Contact: Debby Bennett 410-829-4952

**Bill Scudder celebrating his 65th anniversary as a member of the Maryland Ornithological Society and its Caroline County Chapter**

Nothing stops Bill Scudder from birding. Not Cancer. Not COVID-19. A U.S. Navy veteran, who served for 20 years mostly on ships, Bill has been retired for some years now, but never slows down. In addition to his volunteer work

with local VFW's and the Greensboro Historical Society, Bill is a mainstay of the Caroline County Bird Club, having been a member of the club and its parent organization, the Maryland Ornithological Society for 65 consecutive years, even while serving in the Navy. He has served as a Caroline County Bird Club officer for years, currently serving as Vice President. He also is the Club's representative for the Myrtle Simon Pelot Sanctuary. "I believe I hold the longest consecutive membership in MOS to date" Scudder proudly stated.

Bill attributes his love of birds and birding to his late mother, Carol Scudder. She got him involved at age 10 birding, banding birds, even climbing trees to retrieve abandoned bird nests. "I learned from my mother how to identify the birds and how to respect them," Scudder said. "Birding probably kept me out of a lot of trouble!"



Photo of Bill Scudder by Debby Bennett

He may not be climbing trees anymore, but Bill still actively helps run the local bird club. While the COVID pandemic has put some restrictions on the Club's activities, members are still offering bird walks and participating in bird counts. "Two of our recent bird walks in the last two months have been at the relatively new North County Regional Park in Greensboro" Scudder said. "I am so impressed with the county's foresight to purchase this special property and its conservation work of both the wetlands trail and the meadow restoration. In March, we saw a flock of 20 or so Eastern Meadowlarks in the meadow. That is the largest number I've seen in years!" Other special birding spots he likes to frequent are Christian Park, not far from the North County Park; the Smithville Lake area, and in Choptank near the marina at dawn when the birds burst into what Scudder calls an "amazing morning chorus".

With no thoughts to slow down, Bill Scudder plans to

continue to help the Club with its programs, counts, and bird walks. He said he and the other Club members are always looking for new members and would like to get more local youth out birding. "The MD & DC Breeding Bird Atlas would be a good way for some of our youth to learn about birds and birding and learn what it means to be a citizen scientist."

Caroline County Bird Club, a chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society celebrates its **70th anniversary in 2021!**

Founded by the late Jerry and Roberta Fletcher in March 1951, the Caroline County Bird Club was the first established chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society on the Eastern Shore. Now in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic, the Club is celebrating its 70th anniversary.

The Maryland Ornithological Society is a nonprofit, statewide organization of people who are interested in birds and nature to promote the study and enjoyment of birds. The Society also maintains a system of sanctuaries to encourage the conservation of birds and bird habitat and to help record and publish observations of bird life. The Myrtle Simons Pelot Sanctuary on Drapers Mill Road outside of Greensboro is one of these sanctuaries.

When not in a health pandemic, the Caroline County Bird Club holds meetings on the third Thursday evening at 7:30 pm at the Caroline County Public Library in Denton September - November, and January -May featuring special speakers. Additionally, the Club offers bird walks throughout the year and an annual BigSit! birding event in October. While people can join MOS or just the Caroline County Chapter, all Caroline County Bird Club events are free and open to the public.

Citizen science is a big part of what the Caroline County Bird Club members are involved in. They participate in a Fall Bird Count, a Christmas Bird Count, and a May Bird Count each year in Caroline County. Members are currently participating in the MD & DC Breeding Bird Atlas 3 project and Audubon's Climate Watch survey. They are looking for additional people to help with the counts and with the Breeding Bird Atlas work, including youth. If interested, please contact [caroline@mdbirds.org](mailto:caroline@mdbirds.org). All activities are free and open to the public.

Check out more Caroline County Bird Club information at: <http://carolinebirdclubmos.blogspot.com>

And don't forget to visit our [Facebook](#) page and Like us!



Just go to Caroline County Bird Club

For more information about the Caroline County Bird Club,  
visit its Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100057407532650>  
or website: <http://carolinebirdclubmos.blogspot.com/>

## CECIL COUNTY

Slowly life is beginning to return to normal in Cecil County. Birders are getting out and about. ( see Maryanne's account of a trip to Panama below. ) As we speak, she is off once again, this time to Montana, on another Maryland Ornithological Society ( MOS ) adventure, which she will tell us about next time. County field trips have been reinstated as of April, and the Breeding Bird Atlas Project continues to be the focus of club members' energies.

The Fair Hill Natural Resources Management Area and the Cecil Bird Club have joined forces to try to better understand the breeding schedule of the Bobolinks that use the park for nesting. For the past several years one hundred acres have been set aside by Fair Hill so that late date mowing will allow for greater success for the ground nesting species that use the park. This year *Maryanne Dolan* worked with the Fair Hill management to put in place a team of counters to monitor the daily number of Bobolinks, Eastern Meadowlarks, and Grasshopper and Savanna Sparrows seen in the one hundred acre plot. This should give the park management a better idea of when the birds have finished breeding so that mowing may resume. Until this year an arbitrary mowing date was set assuming that breeding had concluded. Counters include Susan Peterson, Maryanne, of course, *Dave Webb*, *Ken Drier* and *Cathy Carter*. At this juncture the project is still on going.

The Maryland Biodiversity Project will be conducting the first bird morning flight count in Maryland at the lighthouse at Turkey Point in Elk Neck State Park beginning August 1st and continuing until November 15th of this year. This will be very similar to the bird counts that are conducted in Cape May, New Jersey by the Cape May Bird Observatory where there is one daily recorder at the post. We at Cecil are very excited about this new endeavor and hope to see some of you fellow birders out at the point come later this summer and fall.

Club members also continue to monitor the nest boxes at Elk Neck State Park. Just another birding activity at Turkey Point. *Ken Drier* for perhaps ten years running keeps an

eye on the boxes at the Woodlawn Reserve near Port Deposit. Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows and House Wrens account for much of the activity in those boxes. Besides those three species Ken has 22 other confirmed breeders for the Atlas Project within the reserve. Nest boxes have also been installed at Conowingo Park along the Susquehanna River opposite Fisherman's Park at the base of the Conowingo Dam. *Ken Drier*

As promised above, Maryanne's travels to Panama. Perhaps it was she rather than the cicadas that brought a certain rare species back to Cecil County after a 17 year hiatus. What do you think?

*Bettye Maki*, *Gwen Stanhope* and *Maryanne Dolan* did a recon of the MOS Panama trip prior to its departure next year. The birding was outstanding. We had over 245 species with one spectacular bird following another. It would be hard to pick a favorite, but perhaps most impressive were the Mississippi Kites. For two days on the Canopy Tower observation deck we observed thousands upon thousands of kites, along with an impressive range of other raptors, beginning their migration north. I think every Mississippi Kite in North America took to the skies during those two days. Even the guides were awestruck! As for the accommodations....terrific! The rooms were comfortable and the food delicious. It was such a great trip, I re-upped for next year. *Maryanne Dolan*

## MONTGOMERY COUNTY

*Bruce Beehler* writes: "In late May I traveled to Beluga, Alaska, to spend time with nesting Hudsonian Godwits, the subject of my next popular book. At Beluga, I observed the field work being done by Nathan Senner and his team, from the University of South Carolina. The godwits nest on the ground in Black Spruce bogs, but the nests are very well hidden and very difficult to locate. While I was there, Senner's team located 7 godwit nests and affixed geolocators to the members of each godwit pair that tended these nests. Many of these birds had first been marked by Senner 7-8 years ago, and already had carried geolocators down to Chile for the northern winter. I also got to spend time in the White Spruce forests around Beluga and enjoyed tracking down American Three-toed Woodpeckers, which are common and tame there. This is a species that seems to be disappearing from the northeastern US.

*Mike Bowen* reports on his visit with *Anne Cianni* to a strangely empty Magee Marsh in May. "A State Park in Lucas County, Ohio, Magee Marsh, has been for many

years a Mecca for birders from around the World, as migrant birds from the South move north in May and pause at the southern edge of Lake Erie to stoke up on food before eventually flying across the water to Canada and their breeding areas. Because the Covid pandemic closed the Magee Marsh boardwalk to birders in May, 2020, it was a double blow to discover that the boardwalk was closed also in early May, 2021. The Ohio State Park folks who administer Magee Marsh decided for 2021 that the boardwalk would be accessible only for a very short period in late May, and even then only to those who successfully applied for a voucher that gave access for a strictly limited 2-hour period in a time slot that ended on May 17. Anne spent an hour on her phone in mid-April, contacting the ticket center, which turned out to be at the Toledo Zoo's web site, and snagged tickets for the very last permitted access slot -- at noon on Monday, May 17. We arranged our travel to arrive at Magee Marsh just before the ticketed time when we, with a hundred others, surrendered our timed tickets and poured onto the boardwalk -- and had to be forcibly pushed off the other end at 2 p.m. The boardwalk was then sealed off to further occupation. Lots of great birds were seen at point-blank range -- Bay-breasted Warblers seemed particularly common that day, but the pain of being forced off the boardwalk was palpable. The next morning, May 18, we were birding at the nearby Black Swamp Observatory when word came through from the State Park folks that the famous boardwalk had suddenly and unexpectedly been reopened to EVERYONE! Naturally, we went right over there and had the delightful experience of being almost alone on the boardwalk, where in previous years we had had true difficulty moving two feet without encountering an unmoving scrum of birders. For the next three days we had unencumbered access to the boardwalk. It was a birder's dream come true."

*Roy Howard*, a new member of the club, writes: "The absolute highlight of this birding migration season has been the unexpected company of new birding friends that came with meet ups early in the morning. Some sponsored by MBC like the group led by Woody and Rae Dubois at Little Bennet when the weather was 37F with rain. We had 53 species before the outing was done, including Northern Waterthrush among many others, and four new friends who went out two weeks later to Wheaton Regional Park with Chestnut-sided Warbler and more. Then came an unexpected meet up with *Anne Mytych*, again at Little Bennet, where we came upon a perfectly still Eastern Screech Owl perched on a branch. That day also included an ever exuberant Yellow-breasted

Chat. To bookend the 37F day, I took Mark England's invitation to meet at Oaks Landfill in search of the Ruddy Turnstone. It was raining and cold (45F), yet lo and behold, there was the turnstone, along with an assortment of birds including Bald Eagle, Semipalmated Plover and Semipalmated Sandpiper, plus a handsome Blue Grosbeak singing in all his glory. For this new company of birding friends I am enormously grateful." Chris Wright

## PATUXENT CHAPTER

The Patuxent Bird Club is recognizing **David Mozurkewich** for his remarkable service in leading semi-monthly bird walks on the Luther Goldman Birding Trail at Lake Artemesia Natural Area. Dave has been the regular leader for twice-a-month walks on Thursday afternoons or evenings, starting with the first-ever walk on June 5, 2008; he led the walks ever since, until the walks ended on March 5, 2020 at the start of the pandemic. That adds up to over 300 walks and over 600 cumulative miles on foot over a nearly 13-year time span.



Photo of Dave Mozurkewich by Marcia Watson

During that time, Dave missed only a few walks because of travel or work obligations, and of course some walks were cancelled because of weather (very few times) or conflicts with large public events. We don't know how many birders accompanied Dave on the Lake Artemesia bird walks over the years; the walks have been popular and often drew a group of 20 or more, with a mix of biweekly regulars and



new birders. Many birders got their lifer Warbling Vireo, Willow Flycatcher, or Greater White-fronted Goose at Lake Artemesia with Dave's patient help.

Dave is now stepping down as the leader of these walks and the Patuxent Bird Club and Prince George's Audubon Society, who jointly sponsor the walks, are grateful for his loyal and extraordinarily long service. We know that the troop of Lake Artemesia birders will miss his leadership.

The Lake Artemesia walks were started in conjunction with the opening of the Luther Goldman Birding Trail at Lake Artemesia. The trail was constructed as a joint project of Prince George's Audubon Society and the Maryland National Parks and Planning Commission (owner of the park) to honor the late Luther Goldman (1909-2005), a highly respected wildlife biologist who lived in College Park during his later years. Luther served as the first manager of the Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge in California, and was also instrumental in the design and development of other outstanding refuges within the national wildlife refuge system. He was perhaps best known for his photographs of endangered species of birds, taken during his service as chief photographer of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A highly active birder, Luther led many natural history tours and field trips, both locally and abroad. He was a beloved member of both the Patuxent Bird Club and Montgomery Bird Club chapters of the Maryland Ornithological Society, the Prince George's Audubon Society, and the Washington Biologists' Field Club.

**Lake Artemesia Natural Area** is a county-owned park located in the community of Berwyn Heights, just outside College Park in northern Prince George's County. To date, more than 215 bird species have been reported on eBird from Lake Artemesia. *Dave Mozurkewich* has authored a [guide to the Luther Goldman Bird Trail](#) that points out notable birding spots and vantage points along the approximately two-mile loop, which is paved and wheelchair-accessible. You can access Dave's trail guide and read more about [Lake Artemesia](#) in the online *MOS Birder's Guide to Maryland & DC*. *Marcia Watson*.

## SOUTHERN MARYLAND

Not much going on in Southern Maryland so I thought I'd query folks about the Maryland-DC Breeding Bird Atlas. I've had a few interesting confirmations that I thought were

noteworthy and got some feedback from others on their favorites.

*Phin Rouland* notes that he did just confirm Pileated Woodpecker for his Saint Mary's City SE block. He suspected the pair of PIWOs were nesting somewhere in the woods across the street, but since he didn't have permission to walk the property, he couldn't look for the cavity. Fortunately, on May 30, the two adults and three fledglings came across to their trees to pay a visit. Photo of one of the juveniles in his checklist:

<https://ebird.org/atlasmdcc/checklist/S89406835>

*Patty Craig's* favorite confirmation this year was a Pine Warbler stripping the bark off her grape vines for nesting material. Over the years she has seen them collect rabbit fur, horse, and dog hair and other things of that nature, but bark from a plant was entirely different. Going back to previous atlases, an all-time favorite was following an awful smell to a hollow tree and finding two downy Turkey Vultures!

On May 27, *Barb and Chip Whipkey* were at their La Plata Wild Birds Unlimited store (they own the Lexington Park store as well). They feed the crows behind the store and the birds let them know when they need more. They heard them carrying on and went out the door to check their food supply. They found a Red-tailed Hawk circling the back parking lot while carrying nesting material and being chased by the crows.

*Zach Stickney's* coolest confirmation was stumbling across a nest with White-eyed Vireos with one Brown-headed Cowbird chick. It was at random, as he saw a probable female WEVI hanging around the area and found the nest under a holly tree. Photos in Zach's eBird checklist:

<https://ebird.org/atlasmdcc/checklist/S69691554>

While checking an abandoned grain silo for possible nesting Barn Owls, and looking upward through a hole in the side of the silo, *Kyle Rambo* was startled by a loud hiss and screechy squawk and the flapping of wings almost in his face. He stepped back just in time to avoid the adult Black Vulture rising up and out of the silo. Peeking back inside, only four feet below him, were two downy Black Vulture chicks, recently hatched with cracked eggshells still in the nest. NY for BLVU!!! In hindsight, the horrific stench should have tipped him off before he stuck his head through the opening!

*Betty Arthur* suggested that the funniest thing she and her husband *Steve Arthur* have seen regarding breeding bird confirmation was the sighting of three Great Blue Herons out in a cornfield at Newtowne Neck State Park in June 2020. They had parked at the end... but walked way out into one of the fields and there were all these herons. It looked like some were newly-fledged herons... and the next day I emailed Tyler Bell, the St. Mary's County BBA3 coordinator, and asked for his opinion, to which he responded..."Nice, that is totally a juvenile GBHE!" and suggested coding as "Recently Fledged Young." [Based on anecdotal reports of a heron rookery on the isthmus.]

Tyler Bell was over by the shuttered movie theater in California last year trying to pin down a Red-winged Blackbird nest in a retention pond with a nice stand of cattails. As he was trying to see where the RWBLs were dropping down into the reeds, he caught some motion out of the corner of his eye. A female Ruby-throated Hummingbird had flown into the cattails and was plucking fuzz from an old cattail head! Sure, he and his wife, *Jane Kostenko*, would have eventually noticed juveniles coming to their feeder later in the summer but this kick started the season with a CN - Carrying Nesting Material.

Having long ago said good-bye to their aging (indoor) cats, *Tyler Bell* and *Jane Kostenko* were running low on nesting material (cat fur) to offer their backyard birds. A local alpaca owner passed along a big bag of alpaca fur clippings that were too short for the spinning and yarn-making that she does. A fistful of alpaca fur went out into an empty suet cage and, before long, an ambitious Tufted Titmouse was spotted hanging upside down as s/he plucked a beakful of fur from the cage. Instead of flying off with that first grab of fur, though, the bird continued to pluck and pull until the bird's head was completely obscured by the alpaca fur! Most of it fell to the ground as the bird finally flew away to offer a soft and natural lining for a nest! Tyler Bell

## TALBOT COUNTY

### Jan Reese -- An Appreciation

One of the many problems of a long life is the loss of an increasing number of dear, memorable people. The Talbot County Chapter of The Maryland Ornithology Society (Talbot County Bird Club, TCBC) is no exception. Recently we have lost Chandler Robbins, Maryland's most recognized ornithologist; Les Roslund, our Club's finest

ambassador; and Priscilla Thut, field companion extraordinaire. Club President Bettye Maki suggested we honor comrades past by showing our appreciation for treasured colleagues who are still able to receive our appreciation in person. On the occasion of the club's 65th Anniversary, she recommended the Talbot County Bird Club honor *Jan Reese* in this manner.

Jan was born, grew up and lived for many decades on Tilghman's Island and remains a lifelong resident of Talbot County. Like TCBC members *Donald Meritt*, *Terry Allen*, and *Jeff Effinger* among others, it was high school teacher Richard Kleen who introduced him to birds and instilled that interest into a lifelong endeavor. While he paid his bills through work as an automobile body and fender repairman, involvement in a classified project for the US Department of Defense during the Vietnam Conflict, and service in the construction industry, he remained active with independent bird research. This research began in the early 1960's with collaborations with the Fish and Wildlife Service scientists at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center under which he and Donald Meritt operated an Operation Recovery bird banding station at Fairbanks on Tilghman's Island. It continued with a long-term study of Osprey reproductive success during the pesticide era of the 1960-1970's.

Jan's interest in the decline in Osprey abundance was hatched in in the late 1950's. By the time the 1960's rolled around he had undertaken an extended study of local Osprey populations. With the aid of an outboard motorboat loaned by Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, gas fueled by funds from the MOS and help from relatives and friends he studied first-hand the nesting success of Ospreys from egg to fledgling within a 213 square mile study area of Talbot County waterfront. His targets were active nests that he visited at least once every 12 days from March through August for 20 years. Most of the nest locations involved offshore structures such as duck blinds, channel markers and artificial nesting platforms. In fact, he and Meritt personally constructed over 285 such platforms on offshore pilings that remained from ice-destroyed duck blinds and/or newly installed pilings. Some of these nesting platforms were financed through a grant from the local Easton Waterfowl Festival.

These first-hand visits to nests were not without consequences. Colleague Terry Allen relates one incident on Broad Creek in which a very protective female Osprey, talons ablaze, struck Jan from behind, propelling him into the duck blind and leaving quite a gash on the back of his head. A far more favorable consequence was success –

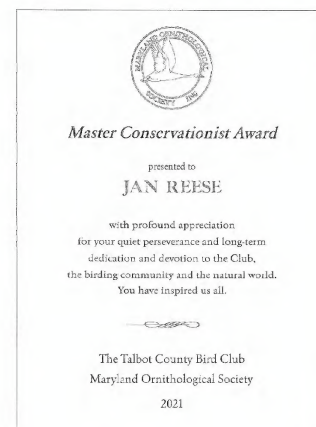


after many years – in convincing the US Coast Guard to stop destroying Osprey nests on channel markers and other navigation structures. No doubt the dogged persistence of himself (curmudgeon?) and others carried the day, although the exact words used in persuasion are blissfully unrecorded. The results of his Osprey research as well as work on other species received peer-review and were published in national ornithological journals in the 1970's. These papers remain classics, not only in Osprey studies but also as examples of productive long-term field research on natural populations.

In the 1990's Jan began an environmental consulting business that involved field reconnaissance, testing and evaluation of physical and natural resources and writing assessments required for land development or preservation. His broad knowledge of flora and fauna served him well, and that knowledge became a hallmark of his relationship with members of the TCBC. Many of us remember his bird walks in which he also identified various insects, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, marine organisms, and plants, illuminating each species with a story. They were walks through natural history with the most personable guide possible.

When the Maryland Port Authority began a study in 1998 to use dredged material from ship channel maintenance to restore rapidly disappearing Poplar Island, state and federal wildlife managers hoped to document the creation of habitat and the response of bird populations. After the actual project got underway Jan was contracted in 2002 to do the bird monitoring. With a clicker for each hand (and another in his head, he says), binoculars and spotting scope in tow, he bicycled the nine-mile- long perimeter dike road bi-weekly year-round for 12 years. He preferred direct counts to population estimates based on sampling. "One reason I liked this job – I experienced the death of the original Poplar Island, and then I saw it reborn."

Scientist, naturalist, trip leader, teacher, and friend: This is what Jan Reese has meant, and continues to mean, to the Talbot County Bird Club. He has been responsible for the recruitment of many new members over the years. More significantly, he continues to be responsible for keeping them here. COVID-19 has forced him to restrict his activities, but member comments like, "Jan showed us nesting goldfinches in that tree over there," will remain for a long, long time. We miss him, and we wish him well. -- Wayne Bell, 2021



Above is wording as it appears on Master Conservationist Award



Jan Reese holds an original painting of an osprey, titled "Windswept," created for him by local artist and birding protégé Camille Woodbury to his left..

#### Sources:

Paul Bystrak, Terry Allen, and Jeff Effinger contributed anecdotal remembrances.

Information on Poplar Island is derived in part from J. Brainard (2013). Return of the birds; bird lover Jan Reese has counted important species on Poplar Island. *Chesapeake Quarterly*, 12(3).

Information on field research: Reese, J. (1977).  
Reproductive success of ospreys in central Chesapeake Bay. *Auk*, 94:202-221.

## TRI-COUNTY

*Bob and Marcia Balestri* decided they had looked at their 4 walls long enough and had Southwest Airlines credits to use before they expired. Where to go that was a short plane ride on Southwest (for Bob) and had new birds (for Marcia)? Jamaica has 28 endemic species, lots of endemic subspecies, and is only 3-1/2 hours away. They found that Green Castle Estate in the "Covid Corridor" were accepting guests and boasted excellent birding opportunities. Armed with their negative Covid tests, they flew into Montego Bay on May 18 and were whisked away to paradise for 9 days. Four of those days were spent birding with 2 different top-notch guides. Most of the endemics were found on the estate itself, and the rest were tracked down spending a day each in the Blue Mountains and Ecclesdown Road. The rest of the time was spent relaxing, hiking the estate, and eating excellent food. Marcia added 35 birds to her life list, and tallied a total of 74 Jamaica birds. Marcia Balestri

## WASHINGTON COUNTY

As was the case for many of you, birding was one of the few safe recreational pursuits available to my wife, *Cheryl*, and myself during the pandemic. Now that we are fully vaccinated we feel free to go on spontaneous trips to pursue our love of birding. In early June we decided to jump in the car and bird our way toward Canaan Valley, West Virginia. We prepped for the trip by looking at recent sightings along the way that were reported to eBird. Despite living in Hagerstown for the last 32 years, we had spent little time visiting far western Maryland so we decided to stop at Finzel Swamp and New Germany State Park. We only started birding several years ago and we are still climbing the learning curve, but we thought that we'd invite you along on our journey.

We arrived at the Finzel Swamp Nature Conservancy site around 0900 and found no one in the parking lot. We had heard old rumors that access to the site had been blocked by a homeowner but this was not the case. We strapped on our tick leggings and sprayed ourselves with OFF bug spray and headed down the trail. The trail was quite narrow with vegetation extending well over our heads. This opened up a bit when we came to the first of several small bridges over the water of the swamp. We were hoping to see wading birds in the swamp but did not. We saw quite a few Red-winged Blackbirds, a few Common

Yellowthroats and an Indigo Bunting among a number of other common species. We heard a Northern Waterthrush singing loudly from a thicket. The highlight of our brief stop was a prolonged close look at a Black-billed Cuckoo. My wife, Cheryl was particularly enamored by the Cuckoo's bright reddish-orange eye.

After leaving Finzel Swamp we decided that we would stop at New Germany State Park. We had noted that a number of warbler species had been reported to eBird from the park just prior to our arrival so we thought that we would give that a try. We had never been there before, further evidence that our birding hobby was opening up new worlds to us. After we parked, we started off down the Turnpike Trail that follows a shallow creek. A little way down the trail I heard a rapid trill that I would have sworn was made by a Worm-eating Warbler (even though eBird doubts my assessment). What we heard next was the last thing that we wanted to hear; a gaggle of about 30 kids on a summer camp field trip, coming up behind us. Luckily, we were able to take the Acorn trail that veered left and went up the side of the mountain. I like kids, but the noise that they were making was not conducive to successful birding. We hiked up and up, hearing an occasional Ovenbird and Acadian Flycatcher. Why is it that the smallest birds have the loudest songs? We walked through the beautiful forest for about 4 hours. We heard a Black-throated Green Warbler clearly but could never see him. We saw numerous Ovenbirds and several Black-throated Blue Warblers. I think I have that song committed to memory now. We finally got back to the valley floor and my wife, the bird-whisperer, spotted some commotion in a bush and out popped 3 Winter Wrens. I presume that they were a new family. I then heard a somewhat complex warbling sound and turned around to see a not too bashful Canada Warbler just above my head. I was able to shoot a few good (for me) pictures before he disappeared. We finished our walk by spying a Blue-headed Vireo and 2 male Blackburnian Warblers.

Our day's birding taught me a few lessons. First of all, just because spring migration is over doesn't mean that the mountains of western Maryland aren't home to some beautiful warblers in the summer. Secondly, there are so many beautiful places in western Maryland and beyond that we have yet to visit. I love retirement. *Michael Saylor*

### Social Media Connection Yields Mississippi Kite

An enthusiastic beginner birder in Washington County saw an unusual bird in her backyard. She paged through her guidebook wondering "is it a new hawk, maybe a

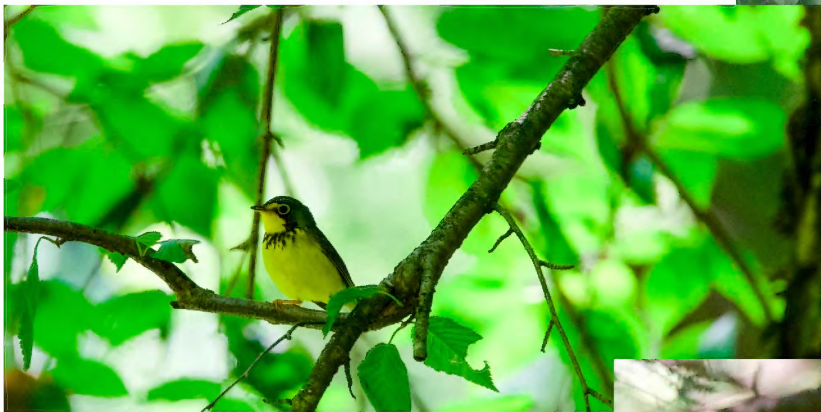


Swallow-tailed Kite?" She did not have a fancy camera so did the best she could with her smart phone and posted her picture to a Maryland birding Facebook page. Experienced birders told her it might be a Mississippi Kite and the page administrator referred her to the Washington County Bird Club. Two of our members soon had permission to come to her property for a look. No bird seen all day or when we arrived. So, we made introductions and chatted a while, while watching some other birds. Then, just as we were asking her to text if she saw it again, the bird returned. A Mississippi Kite indeed! It cooperatively perched in a nearby tree for photos, then treated us to a graceful display of its flying skills as it plucked cicadas from the air. Just beautiful! We scouted around for a nest and second bird, but no luck, so we'll continue to keep an eye on the area in hopes of catching breeding activity.

This sighting adds to just a couple of previous reports in Washington County over the past few years. And the landowner? She's overjoyed to have such a rare and impressive bird visiting, has ordered a spotting scope, and plans to attend our club meetings. A win-win for sure. *Heather McSharry*



Mississippi Kite photo by Mark Addy



Photos of Black-billed Cuckoo (top),  
Canada Warbler (above), and  
Blackburnian Warbler (right) all by  
Linda Field



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Three-toed Woodpecker in Alaska photo by  
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